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Daniel

By: Dr. Lloyd T. Anderson

In the entire prophecy of Daniel, the central theme is the character, course, and consummation of the times of the Gentiles. It is the vision given by the Holy Spirit, faithfully recorded by Daniel. In the eighth chapter everything in verses one to 22 refers to men and empires that have already come and gone. Anyone can read of them in secular history. Verses 23 to 27 have to do with the king of fierce countenance who shall appear in the latter time. This is a graphic indication of the Antichrist. Those evil leaders of the past are shadows of that coming demonic man of sin who is fully described in the closing verses of chapter eight. In this portion God reveals to His servant that part of the Roman Empire out of which the Antichrist will come.

In other words, "the king of fierce countenance" in Daniel 8:23 is the same as "the little horn" of Daniel 7:8. Scriptures indicate that the ram of Daniel's vision in chapter eight represents Medo-Persia while the he-goat is the nation of Greece. The notable horn represents Alexander the Great, and the four notable ones are the four generals under whom Alexander's kingdom was divided.

Verses 9 to 14 of chapter eight have to do with Antiochus Epiphanes, an exceedingly wicked person who lived after Daniel's day fulfilling this prophecy in every detail. It will be helpful to read this chapter repeatedly, before trying to study it analytically. The Lord Himself gives the full interpretation on these inspired pages. He presents the key to the whole book in verse 19, wanting us to know "what shall be in the last end of the indignation."

"Indignation" is a word which means "Great Tribulation" which is yet to come. God has always wanted us to know what the future has in store. This concerns not only our never-dying souls and that we need Jesus Christ as personal Savior, but also involves the ultimate development of world events and prophetic movements. The Lord Jesus declared to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, "Behold, I have told you before, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:25, 33).

It is sad in America that we are seeing a general lowering of morality and godliness. The stability of the home is being assailed on every hand. Thankfully, we as redeemed individuals, a part of the Body of Christ, will be at the translation of the Church before the Antichrist is revealed (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). It should be noted that biblical prophecy occupies about three-fourths of all the teachings in the Word of God.

Three times in chapter eight Daniel explains that the vision has to do with the time of the end (vs. 17, 19, 26). This means the completion of Gentile world dominion. The Tribulation hasn't yet been fulfilled since the Church is still here. Every circumstance in the world today seems to indicate that the yet unfulfilled prophecies must surely come to pass in the not-too-distant future. This

calls for an urgency by God's people in our service for Christ. It should stimulate a keen interest regarding every detail of the vision God gave to Daniel.

Some of the details in chapter eight have been revealed previously. For example, the ram is the same empire symbolized by the arms and breast of silver in the image of chapters two and seven. Likewise, the he-goat is none other than that empire fore-shadowed by the stomach and thighs of brass of Nebuchadnezzar's earlier vision. In like manner, the Antichrist is described in chapters 7, 8, 9 and 11. Let no one think that these oft-repeated references to the same four Gentile world powers, as well as to the Antichrist, are given only for the sake of repetition. Each has a divine purpose, presenting a different aspect of the times of the Gentiles.

It is important to remember that when Daniel saw this vision, Babylon hadn't yet fallen as an empire. It came in the third year of King Belshazzar's reign. Daniel wasn't really in Shushan, but in the vision he saw himself as if he were there. At the time of this writing, Shushan was a comparatively small community. Later it became the capital of Persia (or Iran as we know it today). Events recorded in Daniel aren't always in chronological order. If we arranged the chapters in that manner they would be something like this: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 5, 9, 6, 10, 11 and 12. The Lord hasn't seen fit to give the order in that manner. Also, the book of Daniel was originally written in two different languages: Chaldean (Aramaic), and Hebrew.

Two years after Daniel saw the vision of the four beasts, he was given further revelation about two of the empires: the ram and the he-goat. God wanted to forewarn His people of Tribulation to come, assuring them that their calamity would end at the time appointed. We today can be blessed by what we read even though the book deals primarily with history and biblical prophecy yet to be fulfilled after the home-going of the Church.

Chapter eight describes the rise of one particular power which will unleash its hatred upon the Jews. The first fulfillment is now a matter of history, while the second is yet to come. The latter occurred between the Old and New Testaments, sometimes known as the 400 silent years. The second will transpire during the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), at the very close of the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:34). This is toward the end of the Great Tribulation yet to come after the Church has been taken home to be with the Lord. In that final state of the long chastisement of the Jewish people, Jerusalem will be the epic center of the storm. Nobody but God can foretell the coming centuries and their happenings!

When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two, he already knew that Babylon was going to be overcome by another kingdom, although he wasn't aware of the specific timing. Since Persia was to figure in the overthrow of Babylon, the geographical setting of the vision was significant (8:2). Daniel was transported to Persia in spirit to behold what God wanted him to see. Prophetic revelation bears clear witness to the omniscience of God. The events foretold in this vision were fulfilled within 200 years. The liberal who doesn't believe in the inspiration of the Bible, foolishly maintains that Daniel was written after these events had transpired. Such was certainly not the case. In fact, the entire book reveals the omniscience, omnipotence, and wonder of the God whom we serve today.

In the book of Daniel we have the central theme of biblical prophecy: the commencement, character, course and climax of the times of the Gentiles. In the eighth chapter further details are unfolded by the Holy Spirit. Everything in this portion deals with events and empires which historically have already come and gone. From verses 23 to 27 the reference has to do with the king of "fierce countenance

who shall appear in the latter times." This individual is none other than the Antichrist, the political ruler who will be in predominance during the Tribulation. He is the beast who comes up out of the sea (Revelation 13). He will perhaps come from the territory which comprised the old Roman empire. Associated with him will be ten subordinate kings, all doing his bidding.

Daniel was shown that part of the Roman empire out of which this evil superman will arise, namely the part over which Alexander the Great once ruled. The ram of Daniel's vision represents Medo-Persia; the he-goat is Greece. The notable horn stands for Alexander the Great, with the four notable ones, those four generals unto whom Alexander's kingdom was divided when he died.

Chapter eight closes with a detailed description of the terrible, wicked coming ruler. It is a good idea to read the entire chapter repeatedly. Remember, it is not man's speculation that determines the passage, but rather the Lord Himself who gives the full interpretation. God gives us the key to the whole book when He tells us in the last part of verse 19 that He wants us to know what shall be in the last end of the indignation. "Indignation" is another word for the time of tribulation. Compare scripture with scripture.

One of the strongest evidences for divine inspiration and plenary inerrancy is the fact of fulfilled biblical prophecy. Our heavenly Father alone can predict in advance what is going to occur. Commencing with chapter eight is the Jewish portion of the book. From the early part of chapter two through chapter seven the language used is Chaldean, referring largely to the Gentiles. From this point to the conclusion of the book, the language is Hebrew.

We see that approximately two years have elapsed between chapters seven and eight. At the time of the vision Daniel was approximately 88 years of age. Whether the prophet was actually in the palace in Sushan in his body or transported in his spirit, isn't clear. It is the fact of the vision that really concerns us. Daniel sees an angel who appeared in human form (8:16). Gabriel had a profound effect upon the prophet causing him to fall upon his face. Daniel was told what he was about to reveal. It wasn't merely historical but also was full of prophecy, having to do with the time of the end (8:17). The angel instructed the prophet regarding the relationship of the vision. "The last end of the indignation" refers especially to the closing days of God's chastisement upon His own chosen people Israel. They are to be prepared for the day of confession, repentance, and forgiveness. The ultimate will be their deliverance from the coming superman to rule over the earth.

In some prophetic passages God gives specific information. "The ram which thou sawest, having two horns, are these the kings of Media and Persia" (Daniel 8:20). This corresponded to the breast and arms of silver in Nebuchadnezzar's image (Daniel 2), and the bear that was lifted up on one side (Daniel 7). The ram was the symbol of Persia which she bore on all her banners. Because the word of God shall stand forever (Isaiah 40:8), those who know the Lord should study the book of Daniel with diligence and concern, earnestly desiring to know the mind of our heavenly Father.

"Daniel saw the ram pushing westward and northward, and southward, so that no beasts might stand before him" (v. 4). Notice the three directions from which the Persian empire launched its attack against Babylonia. History gives evidence of the complete and detailed fulfillment of this biblical prophecy. The Persians achieved vast conquests in all the directions cited by Daniel. The result was a mighty empire spreading from the land of India to Ethiopia. In that day it was

the known world.

Not only will God laugh at those who openly defy His principles and truth (Psalm 2:2-5), but also He will pour out judgment upon them so His plans may be brought to fruition (Psalm 2:9). For centuries godless, merciless dictators have sought to rule the world. In every instance they were permitted only limited accomplishment before being stricken by the hand of God. Our Lord is the Ruler of the universe. Just because He is invisible to the human eye doesn't mean that He isn't real. Don't be alarmed by the events of the day. The true born-again believer can rest in the fact that all is done according to God's will. No one, irrespective of military power, can go further than the Lord's divine plan will permit. Psalm 24:1 declares, "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and the world and all they that dwell therein." God's purposes will be brought to pass, not according to our desires but rather in the perspective of His will. What a consoling truth in the midst of life's uncertainties and perplexities.

While Daniel was waiting before God in quiet meditation, another vision was given to him. Each of us also needs to practice waiting upon the Lord, desiring to know more of His truth. As an example, you can't understand prophecy through a casual, hasty reading of the Bible (Psalm 27:14; 39:3). The fire burns in our hearts only as we meditate on the scriptures of the living God.

It was almost 300 years after Daniel's vision before it was ever fulfilled. The East had always been the center of civilization. But Daniel's vision made it clear that a mighty power would arise in the West (8:21). Gradually Greece began to emerge from weakness to strength until, when Persia least expected it, this irresistible power took control. We are told that the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. This symbolizes Alexander the Great, who headed up the Greco-Macedonian empire.

The description of Alexander's conquest of Persia is given by the prophet. "And I saw him come close unto the ram, and he was moved with anger against him, and smote the ram, and broke his two horns; and there was no power in the ram to stand before him, but he cast him down to the ground, and stamped upon him; and there was none that could deliver the ram out of his hand." This is confirmed in secular history. For centuries the Persians had been the object of hatred on the part of the Greeks because of former conquests. The Greeks were never able to overcome the humiliation they received. Finally the time came for revenge. Alexander struck with all his fury. History confirms every detail.

God will bring to pass everything He said He would do. We read, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). If God were to fail even once, He would be fallible like the rest of us. But the Word of God is settled once and for all, never to change. Long after the achievements of men have passed away, the Word of God will continue (Matthew 24:35). The Lord has given us in His Word instructions for living, not only in this life but also in the life yet to come (Psalm 32:8).

It is the Lord's purpose in prophecy to forewarn His people of tribulation to come. He desires to assure them that their calamity will end at the time of His divine appointment. This portion, in Daniel 8, doesn't deal directly with the Body of Christ, the Church. Still Christians may share much from the message of this portion. The Lord gives us also a chart to guide us through human history. We are to rely upon His promises, standing fast against temptation and persecution.

Daniel 8 particularly describes the rise of one power which will unleash its hatred

upon the Jewish people. The first fulfillment occurred between the Old and the New Testaments, in the period sometimes known as "the four hundred silent years." The second will take place during the great tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7). It will come at the close of the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). Jerusalem will be the strong center of activity in those days.

Daniel was transported in the spirit to Shushan which, in Hebrew, means "the fortress." It later became a capital of the Medo-Persian empire, as well as a summer residence for Persian kings. Nehemiah lived there and in this same area the events in the book of Esther transpired. Residences of kings in those days were fortresses as well as palaces. In ancient times the ram symbolized power, while its horn represents strength. This was particularly the symbol of Persia.

Media developed first and became the most extensive and powerful empire the world had known to that point. Under Cyrus, however, Persia almost absorbed the land of Media. This empire was vast and far-flung. No kingdom could stand against it. Scripture assures that these things don't happen apart from the will of God (I Samuel 2:7, 8). Domestic animals represent powers in relationship to Israel (8:5-8).

Before Alexander, new powers usually arose in the east. The way was prepared for Christianity to spread westward across the face of the world. Some world leaders have known intuitively that their lives have had far-reaching meaning and purpose. Napoleon was one of this type, and Hitler was another. Every child of God, in a different sense, is also a person of destiny whose life has far-reaching meaning. Each of us is involved in the conflict of the ages.

In Daniel 8:8 we read, "Therefore, the he-goat grew very great; and when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and for it came up four notable ones toward the four winds of heaven." After breaking the last Persian resistance, Alexander the Great swept eastward conquering territory which would include today's Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. He established his headquarters at Babylon enjoying the pleasures and self-indulgences of that life. He died at the age of 32, in the 13th year of his rule and reign. His vast empire was eventually divided among four generals. These generals and their successors became the kings of the north and south respectively (Daniel 11).

There are two little horns in Daniel. The first in chapter seven arises out of the fourth beast (Roman empire). The one in chapter eight belongs to the he-goat or the Grecian empire. It has already gone down in human history. This little horn (8:9) is Antiochus the Fourth, who called himself Epiphanes, meaning "the glorious one." (Others referred to him as "the maniac.") The celestial bodies doubtless symbolize the Jewish people. Judaism was pronounced illegal. Antiochus forbade the Jews to circumcise their sons, observe the Sabbath and other holy days, or even to present offerings to Jehovah in the temple. They were commanded to worship Greek gods and goddesses, observing vile rites of pagan worship. The Jews were forced to offer unclean animals like pigs on the altars of the temple of God.

Unhappily, many Christians are very much like these Jews. They want all this world can give them, and they want heaven too. Jews who had any regard for Jehovah rejected the program of the evil emperor. When they refused to obey, Antiochus, in one assault on the city of Jerusalem, killed 40,000 Jews in three days' time, carrying away 10,000 captives into slavery. If it hadn't been for the fanatical determined resistance of the godly Jewish people who risked their lives to oppose this tyrant, the emperor might have succeeded in stamping out their religion. The

whole story is told in the books of the Apocrypha, 1st and 2nd Macabees. God would allow this suffering to come upon the Jews because of their own sins.

Worst of all, as is always the case in apostasy, the truth would be cast down to the ground, along with those who have ignored it (Daniel 8:13). The word "saint" (Daniel 8:13) should be read really "holy one" or "angel." "Days" in 8:14 is better translated "evenings and mornings." Then Daniel explains his vision in verses 15 to 19. The events recorded in this chapter were yet future when Daniel saw them in his vision. It is no wonder that he was perplexed and wanted to know their meaning. Gabriel was God's special messenger to bear important news (vs. 17-19).

Daniel's response to this wonderful angel was the natural reaction of a mortal to the purity and glory of a heavenly being. He was afraid and fell on his face. We should feel a sense of awe as we approach God in worship and prayer. The indignation (8:19) is God's wrath because of the idolatry and unfaithfulness of His own people Israel (Hosea 1-4). Jehovah rooted His people out of their land because of their sin (Deut. 29:28). Gabriel's answer points far ahead to a more remote fulfillment at the end of the age. Antiochus Epiphanes was simply a type of the coming Antichrist. Daniel faints after he sees what the transgression will be. He tells us, "Afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it" (8:27).

I Thessalonians

By: Dr. Lehman Strauss

I and II Thessalonians are probably the first writings of the New Testament epistles. When Paul wrote to the church there from Corinth, about 50 A.D., it was at the close of his second missionary journey. His first letter contains great doctrinal teaching with subjects on grace, peace, prayer, faith, hope, election, assurance, the Holy Spirit, Satan, and last but not least, the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the special features includes the aspect of the second coming of our Savior.

It is noteworthy that each epistle concludes with an emphasis on the Lord's return. Such teaching encourages new converts in any age to stand firm in the face of persecutions. Paul praised the Thessalonian Christians for their "work of faith and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father" (I. Thessalonians 1:3). This signifies a fatiguing work which really cost them something. They became imitators of the apostles and set a good pattern to those about them. Knowing that Christ was coming again, they labored even to the point of exhaustion. This infant church, bathed in the truth of Christ's second coming, is the only congregation Paul calls a pattern church. What a challenge then to teach the prophetic Scriptures.

In this series we will examine the closing part of each of the five chapters where the theme of the coming of the Lord is prominent. In chapter one we find in verses 9 and 10, "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Christians in Thessalonica were living day by day in the spirit of anticipation and expectation of Christ's return. The possibility of the Lord's imminent appearance was their living hope. Their conversion was genuine, causing them to turn to God from idols.

How can anyone say that prophecy throttles the work of the Lord? These saints in Thessalonica were waiting for God's Son from heaven. The Holy Spirit makes it crystal clear that Christ Himself is coming back. The Savior is unmistakably identified as the One whom God raised from the dead. The verse further identifies Him, "even Jesus." Our Lord promised earlier, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). This same Jesus who ascended from earth to heaven is coming back again (Acts 1:11).

Our deliverance from the coming judgments upon the earth is certain and complete (I Thessalonians 1:10). The wrath referred to here is that which will come upon this earth during the Tribulation. The verb translated "deliver" means "to draw to oneself." Thus, by taking us to Himself at the Rapture, Christ will rescue us

out of the coming judgments to befall the earth. We read in Romans 5:9, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." The promise of the Lord Jesus to His own is followed up with these words in Revelation 3:10, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Let me assure you that wrath is surely coming upon the earth. There is a time when God will judge this sinful world. The human race can't continue to defy the laws of God. There must come a day of reckoning. The Christian will escape that day of wrath and sudden destruction (5:4). We will be with Jesus who will rescue us out from that day.

The imminent and personal return of Christ was the hope of the early church, and it has continued to remain the hope of the church until this present hour. Would there be any hope in looking for the Great Tribulation, looking for the wrath of God? Certainly that would be just the opposite.

These people "turned to God from idols." This was no mere "turning over a new leaf" on their part. The word "turned" in the original suggests a single definite act in which a once-for-all deliberate choice was made. They weren't merely professing Christians. This blessed bondage to Jesus Christ is both voluntary and joyous. There is nothing quite like it in all of life's experience. Have you turned to God from your idolatry? Have you read God's definition of idolatry? We are told, "Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:4, 5). Covetousness is idolatry (Ephesians 5:5) We should thank God for those Christians who, like the Thessalonians, ceased to live for self. Their whole goal is in anticipation of the Savior's coming again.

At Thessalonica, this was a working, witnessing and waiting church (1:3, 8, 10). What made these believers live like that was the blessed hope of Christ's coming again? Anyone looking for the Savior's return will be occupied with good things. Jesus said, "Occupy till I come." There was no place for idolatry or covetousness, but rather a selfless, sacrificial spirit among them.

Let us join together in asking God to help us be our human best, filled with the Holy Spirit, so that the light of the Gospel will shine brightly and touch the lives of others through us for His glory.

Although chapter and verse divisions in the Bible aren't a part of the inspired text, there are some helpful study aspects found here in I Thessalonians. Each of the five chapters concludes with an emphasis on the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter one the emphasis was on the readiness of the believer in view of the Lord's return.

In chapter two the emphasis changes. It isn't the readiness of the believer but rather the reward that is underscored. Paul's ministry in Thessalonica had been so blessed of God in the power of the Holy Spirit that many sinners surrendered to the Lord in salvation. Having been separated from these young converts, he now expresses an earnest desire to see them again (I Thess. 2:17, 18). Their state of affairs had caused the apostle heaviness of heart. Keep in mind that wherever there is an opportunity to serve the Lord there will also be opposition from Satan. Paul states it clearly and boldly, "Satan hindered us" (v. 18). Those who sought to throttle his witness were being influenced by the devil. Actually, it was Satan who made the road to Thessalonica impassable.

Within the limits set by our sovereign God, the enemy of man's soul can hinder

the greatest of God's servants from engaging in some worthwhile work. The closer we come to the end of this age the faster will be the tempo of Satan's stepped-up activity. This sinister and mysterious enemy of Christ and His people was originally among the sons of God (Job 1:6). He was a created angel but in pride fell and became the evil adversary (Isaiah 14:12-14). He is the wicked one, the prince of the power of the air, and the god of this age.

The fact that this evil personage still retains a dominating hold on this world system, controlling the minds of so many people, should send Christians to their knees in prayer every day in behalf of Christ's true servants. That is why Paul urged, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you, And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for all men have not faith (3:1, 2).

There is something specifically the devil can't do. There is no way he can rob us of our hope, joy, or crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming. The devil has power to distress and to deter God's children, but he can't interfere with the rewards to be given to those who are faithful servants at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

There are five crowns mentioned in the New Testament, all of which constitute future rewards for faithfulness in service. First is the incorruptible crown (I Corinthians 9:24-27). This is promised to those who discipline themselves daily for the race of life in order that they might be their best for God and His cause. As Christians we need to be aware that the body belongs to God by His creative as well as redemptive right. In II Timothy 4:8 there is the crown of righteousness. This is guaranteed all Christians who love Christ's appearing. Surely the Thessalonian believers will be recipients of this reward. In I Peter 5:1-4 there is the crown of glory. This will be awaiting those who give themselves, without seeking selfish gain, in the care of God's flock during the absence of the Chief Shepherd. How much the local assembly needs the oversight of good and godly men. Paul must have labored for this crown also.

In James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10 there is a crown of life. In both of these verses it seems to be the special reward for those who suffer because of their loyalty to God. These are faithful even unto death. How we can all thank God for the encouragement of His Word and for the bright hope and the prospect that awaits us when Jesus comes again. Don't fall by the wayside. Remember, "It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful." Be busy about God's business. Give your time to prayer, witnessing. letter writing to unsaved friends, and in every case, your very best for the Lord.

The fifth crown is that of rejoicing. This is our Lord's reward to those Christians who have witnessed faithfully of Him and, by their witness, have been the instruments through whom others have been saved. All isn't lost when we are busy investing our time, talents, and money in winning others to Christ. For us, our future holds a living and vital hope. When Christ comes back and life's journey is over, we will see Him in heaven. Then we shall know the added joy of having our spiritual children with us, those whom we led to Christ as Savior.

Though Satan may succeed in hindering us from doing some things, he can't prevent the glorious consummation of our hope of seeing Christ as well as those whom we have won to Him. Your voice may never be heard over a chain of radio stations. You may never write a book that will be read by someone else. But as you pray for and support those who do, God will permit you to share in the rewards when the Lord Jesus comes again.

Paul and his co-workers had been accused of preaching the Gospel with mercenary motives. These closing verses in chapter two repudiate such false charges. Their present inward joy, plus the prospect of presenting precious souls to Christ at His coming, were reward enough. I don't look upon my reward in terms of dollars and cents. In ministering the Word of God, I look to the Lord to reap the reward when Jesus comes again. The test of a person's motives is in that which he finds joy and satisfaction.

Thank the Lord for those noble servants of Christ in our own day whose lives are dedicated to the propagation of God's truth. They aren't preaching for cash but for converts. They are happy and full of praise when they see the Word of God changing lives and drawing men to the Savior. Their glory and joy are in every God-given opportunity to reach precious souls with the all-powerful and saving Word of the living Creator. I want to be that kind of a minister. We might not have the joy of fellowshiping on earth with all of the converts, but we will see them in heaven! In that day it will be our portion to look at those who are there because we prayed, testified and gave of our material goods. What is your prospect of reward? The Lord Jesus is coming! "And behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). Are you keeping the end in view? God has only one way of saving lost sinners, and that is by faith in the death and resurrection of His Son. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

In I Thessalonians chapter three we are confronted again with the return of Christ. In verses 12 and 13 there is the exhortation, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you, to the end he may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." This shows the relationship of the believer one to another. Wherever life begins it should develop and mature. Some Christians seem to be much slower than others. This is why there are both spiritual and carnal believers (I Corinthians 3:1; I John 2:13).

I know there is room for growth in my life because I meet Christians from time to time who are far out ahead of me. I long to be like them in the Lord. Occasionally I will meet someone with an unusual display of patience and say to myself, "Why can't I be as long suffering as that brother?" This appeal to progress, "increase and abound," is supported by several kindred passages in the New Testament (Philippians 3:12-14; II Peter 1:5; 3:18).

In view of the imminent return of our Lord, we Christians are told to "increase and abound in love one toward another." Love is a precious commodity, becoming more and more scarce as our age draws to a close. Waning love among Christians is a blight upon churches, denominations, mission boards, and societies throughout the whole world. The condition becomes worse so that in some areas we have seemed to have slipped backwards. Love among Christians is conspicuous by its absence.

Normal Christian growth should bring with it an increase in love toward one another, as well as toward all men. No "hatemonger" is ready for the Lord's return. A person may call himself a Christian, even confessing his faith in the doctrine of the Second Coming, but if his heart is tainted with bitterness and animosity against others, he is unprepared for the Rapture.

While the Christians in Thessalonica had shown love to others, the Holy Spirit knew how easy it was for dissention and strife to enter in. As a preventive,

they are told to use the fact of Christ's return as an incentive to a richer and fuller display of love. Jesus said in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give unto you; that ye love one another as I have loved you." Love is the greatest characteristic (I Corinthians 13:3). Love is also the greatest constraint (II Cor. 5:14). It is the greatest covering (I Peter 4:8). Love can be known only by the actions it prompts and prevents. It was God's love that prompted Him to send His Son to the cross in order that He might prevent us from going to hell (John 3:16).

The expression of God's love is an exercise of His will and deliberate choice. It stems from the very nature of our heavenly Father. Christian love is the manifestation of the new nature. The Christian receives the capacity to love the moment he becomes by faith a new creation. The new birth brings with it God's new nature. It is stated that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5).

The Bible tells us that love is the first of the ninefold fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Too often our expressions of love are prompted by impulses, feelings and selfish desires. We are nice to people who are nice to us. But love doesn't work ill to anyone (Romans 13:10). Love seeks an opportunity to do good unto all men (Galatians 6:10). Such a choice brother or sister in Christ is rare in our day and most refreshing, to say the least.

In view of the imminence of Christ's appearing, we are to "increase and abound in love one toward another" (I Thess. 3:12, 13). This same combination is stressed in the epistle to the Philippians (1:9, 10). Do you sense a lack of love? Do you long to abound in this rich treasure? God's love in you, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, can be released and set to work, not in puny portions but in abundance, overflowing wave upon wave. Let us love one another and be ready to meet Christ at His coming.

God has set a goal for His children. When Christ comes to receive us unto Himself, that goal will be realized. All the redeemed shall then be made perfect; absolutely unblamable (I John 3:1, 2). Through Christ's love He wants to sanctify and cleanse the church through the washing of water by the Word. He desires His bride to be glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The Holy Spirit wants to establish our hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints (II Thess. 3:13). It isn't that the Christian will attain sinless perfection in this life. Don't read that into the passage. There is never an eradication of the old nature. We are to increase and abound in love so that we will not be ashamed before Christ when He comes.

It has always been my teaching that we should distinguish between Christ's coming for His saints at the Rapture (an event that can occur at any moment) and His coming with His saints, that is, His return to earth to establish His Millennial reign. Who are these saints in verse 13 who will accompany the Lord Jesus when He comes to rapture the Church? They are Christian believers, not angels. They are the redeemed who have fallen asleep or died in the Lord and who are presently with Christ. When Jesus appears to rapture the Church, they will be with Him. Their dead bodies will be raised and then they, along with the living Christians, will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. At that time all saved people, those who have been in heaven with Christ and returned with Him, and those living on the earth when He comes, will be presented to the Father unblamable in holiness.

In our redeemed bodies it will never again be possible for any Christian to sin.

All the redeemed will be wholly sanctified, not merely God's set-apart ones positionally as we are now, but His sanctified ones perfectly in glory (Col. 3:4). At that day the very highest degree of holiness will be our blessed portion. While we wait for His appearing, let us spend our lives in obedience to the Word of God and in sharing it with others. There is no room in the heart of a child of God for intolerance. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if the Lord were to come and find any one of us hating someone else? The Scripture is very clear, "Increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all, even as we do toward you, to the end ye may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

In I Thessalonians chapter four, the major prophetic emphasis is found in verses 13 through 18. This section deals with the Rapture of the Church in view of the Lord's return. While it is a very familiar passage, a much closer scrutiny is certainly warranted.

The present and future state of the dead has been a subject for much speculation and denominations leave people utterly confused and often in spiritual darkness. Additionally, the devil has so blinded and bewildered the minds of people that few seem to give serious thought to their eternal state after death.

I Thessalonians 4 says the Holy Spirit speaks only of those Christians who have died before Christ comes for His Church. Paul had taught young converts that they could look for the Lord's return. Apparently they thought this tremendous event might occur in their lifetime. Meanwhile, a number of their Christian loved ones had died. Bereaved survivors were distressed by the fear that those who had died would have to occupy some lesser position compared to those who would be alive at Christ's coming. The Holy Spirit knew fully the sorrow and concern in their hearts. This treatise was written to them as well as to us regarding the future of those who die in Christ before the Lord returns.

The apostle begins with a clarification, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep." There are some false sects which use this passage to support their erroneous doctrine of soul-sleep. The word "sleep" is a synonym for the dead and is used only of the death of the body. The Lord Jesus described Lazarus in this same manner (John 11:11, 12). In writing of the death of Stephen, Luke tells us that he fell asleep. "Sleep" and the death of the body are used interchangeably or synonymously. Paul wrote later, "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept" (I Corinthians 15:20). Remember that only the body is in view in this metaphorical use of the word "sleep." The spiritual part of man never lapses into a state of unconsciousness. Daniel affirmed, "Them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." Here, as with the New Testament writers, he was using language not applicable to the spiritual part of man. It is the body which returns to dust and which will eventually be raised again. Nowhere does the Bible teach soul-sleep.

When a born-again Christian dies, he is absent from the body and present with the Lord (II Corinthians 5:8). To die physically is "to depart and to be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23). When it is said of Tribulation saints, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," that state of blessedness could not possibly mean unconsciousness. How could that be considered happy or even unhappy? Whatever sorrow Christians experience over the death of a loved one, it is not to be compared with the hopeless despair of the unsaved. This is why the apostle said, "Ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."

The provision God has made for those who die before Christ returns for the Church

is, "Even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him" (v. 14). Paul wanted living saints comforted by the fact that those who had died, and whose bodies were buried, are with Christ. When Jesus comes again He will bring them with Him. Death doesn't mean nonexistence. Christ's last words from the cross were, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." It is with the Father that both His spirit and resurrected body are now. Even so, provision has been made for the spirit and the body of those who have died in the Lord. When the Savior comes again, gathering the living saints to Himself and raising the bodies of the dead saints, the spirits of the dead He will bring with Him. Since they are with Him now, they will come with Him then. At the time of the Rapture, the dead in Christ will accompany Christ (I Thess. 3:13).

Before Paul continues he gives his authority for such teaching, "This we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (4:15). He was writing by divine authority. He then assures, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." This gives us a wonderful expectation about the generation of Christians living on the earth when Christ returns who will go to heaven without experiencing death. Like Enoch and Elijah, this generation will be translated alive to heaven. The Rapture won't give the living precedence over those who have died. The word "prevent" in the King James means to precede or to go before. The living will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Verse 16 tells us that "The dead in Christ shall rise first." Here the bereaved are reassured concerning their departed loved ones. Millions of Christians whose bodies are sleeping in the earth are certain to rise at the shout, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God. There is no reason given as to why the voice of an archangel is to be heard. The Bible doesn't tell us if there is more than one archangel. Michael is the only one mentioned in Jude 9. The fact that he is called one of the chief princes (Daniel 10:13) does suggest there might be other angelic beings of this same rank. We do know an angel of high rank will accompany Christ.

There are a number of trumpets mentioned in the Bible. In the Old Testament one was used to call the people to worship; others were used for work and warfare. Israel was accustomed to the use of the trumpet. There was even the feast of trumpets (Lev. 23). The nation will again hear the sound (Matt. 24:31). Please note that the trumpet here in I Thessalonians has no association with Israel. Do not err in thinking that Israel and the Church are the same. The promises given to Israel in the Old Testament aren't fulfilled in the Church in the New Testament at all. There are two distinct and different entities here.

The human race has a three-fold division: Jew, Gentile, and the Church of God (I Cor. 10:32). The trumpet here means that the whole army of the redeemed will ascend into heaven when the sound is heard. This same trumpet sound is mentioned again in I Corinthians 15:52, there defined as "the last trump." This means the last trump of the present dispensation of grace. Please don't confuse the Rapture trumpet with the trumpets mentioned in Revelation chapters 8, 9, and 11. Please make that distinction. The Rapture trumpet is a trumpet of grace, deliverance, and salvation. The trumpets of Revelation are signals of judgment, pouring out God's wrath upon a Christ-rejecting world.

Following the resurrection of believers, Paul continues, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The "we" here suggests that Paul himself thought it possible that he could be alive when Christ returns. When the Lord Jesus does come again, Christians will be divided into two classes, namely, the living and the dead. None of us know in what moment death might over-

take us or that Christ might appear. Paul longed for the appearing of Christ, yet he wasn't afraid of death.

There are two imminent events each of us must face. But whether dead or alive when Christ appears for His Church, all believers shall be caught up together. The verb "caught up" suggests the idea of a sudden snatching away. Think of it, all Christians, all saved people of the dispensation of grace, going up together to heaven, immediately at the same time. You may be sure that there will not be a subsequent parting. Thank God for that! Death has separated loved ones here on earth, but there will never be a separation when Jesus comes for His own.

The Rapture of the Church will commence the perfect and final fulfillment of the Christian's hope. We can take these words to our hearts individually and strengthen one another mutually. Here is balm for the broken hearted; strength for the sorrowing. This hope can be the prospect of any and all who will put their trust in Jesus Christ. The Bible is clear in its teaching. Jesus is coming again. Are you ready? I John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in him, that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming." Christ is coming again! Where will you spend eternity? As a Christian, are you satisfied that you have done all with your time, strength and treasure that you can do to help propagate the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? May you be ready for the coming of the Lord.

There is a plain, straightforward orderliness in the way our English version of I Thessalonians takes up the important event of Christ's return. The Lord's coming is stated in all five chapters, with a different emphasis attached to each statement. By way of review, chapter one deals with the readiness of the believer (vs. 1, 10): "No place for idolatry." In chapter two there are the rewards of the believer (vs. 19, 20); "No place for idleness." In chapter three there is the relationship of the believer (vs. 12, 13); "No place for intolerance." In chapter four, the Rapture of the believer (vs. 13-18); "No place for ignorance." Finally, in the fifth chapter the responsibility of the believer is seen (vs. 22-24); "No room for indifference." Paul urges us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." When it comes to personal holiness we dare not be indifferent. This injunction applies both to evil teaching as well as to evil practices. We are to turn away from every form of evil, even in our thoughts and speech. The Christian who loves his Lord's appearing will even hold himself away from those who engage in evil practices.

The key is, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). The appropriate title, "God of Peace" reoccurs in several other passages of the New Testament (Romans 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; Heb. 13:12). By His very nature our Lord is characterized by peace. The apostle's appeal to a life of practical sanctification is accompanied by the assured help of the God of Peace. He it was who made peace between Himself and the sinner through the shedding of Christ's blood (Col. 1:20). The Savior is now our peace (Ephesians 2:14). This is our positional sanctification (Hebrews 10:10, 14). This is also our baptism into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13).

In this 23rd verse notice especially the word "wholly." This doesn't imply sinless perfection. It simply indicates that sanctification is to extend to the whole person in every part: spirit, soul and body. This idea of positional sanctification is seen frequently in the Old Testament. Genesis 2:3 shows that a day was sanctified. Exodus 29:27 indicates an offering was sanctified. Exodus 29:37 portrays an altar sanctified. In Exodus 29:44 the tabernacle is sanctified.

In Leviticus 27:14 the house was sanctified. These are merely things unable to commit sin. There was no moral implication involved. The seventh day (Genesis 2:3) wasn't made sinless. A day is neither moral nor immoral. The word "sanctify" simply means that God set aside the seventh day exclusively for His special purpose. Even so, a Christian is said to be "sanctified." He is set apart by God as the Lord's possession for a special purpose.

Our present positional sanctification isn't an end in itself. It is merely the beginning. The Bible also teaches the believer's practical sanctification which involves human responsibility. Total sanctification isn't an act begun and accomplished in a moment. It is a process which will reach perfection only at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Savior expects us to sanctify ourselves by being set apart day by day. The word "saint" is simply the noun form of the verb "sanctify." Both come from the common Greek term meaning "holy ones" or "set apart ones."

Unfortunately it is possible for a believer to be set apart positionally and yet not be set apart in the practical sense. Some of the Christians at Corinth were carnal and worldly. They had even tolerated immorality in their midst. This is why Paul urged, "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (II Corinthians 6:17, 28; 7:1). Believers should grow in grace through the study of the Word of God and by yielding oneself in obedience to its admonitions and expectations. Growth must follow birth (I Peter 2:2). For His disciples the Lord prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."

I don't believe a Christian can be spiritual if he neglects the Bible. As a Christian, my body belongs to God. It is His both by creative and redemptive right. It must be surrendered to Him (Romans 12:1). The body is the only vehicle God uses to accomplish His work. It wasn't possible for us to be redeemed until the Lord became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. In this way He was reconciling the world unto Himself.

Chastity is an important part of God's will for every Christian. We cannot be indifferent about this matter. Any form of illicit sexual behavior is utterly incompatible with the sanctification God requires of born again children of His. We cannot claim redemption for our souls and then sin with our bodies. The problem with immorality can arise in any one of us. We all stand in dire need of a constant work of grace in our lives. The purpose of positional sanctification is to produce practical sanctification in the lives of Christians. God doesn't save a person and then allow him to continue in sin. We are expected to live a holy life. The goal of sanctification is perfection. Even though we won't attain it in this life, we are to reach for it, never underestimating the power and provision of the Holy Spirit at our disposal.

At the return of our Lord Jesus Christ for His own, all believers will be presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight"(Colossians 1:22; I Cor. 15:51). The whole person, including the body, will be sanctified by God when we see Him, set apart beyond the possibility of ever sinning again. This is called our adoption (Romans 8:23), the perfection or the redemption of the body.

There isn't any question about the eternal destiny of the soul for the saved person. There will be no saved people in hell. Let there be no question about that. There is an aspect of our redemption, however, for which we are waiting. It is future. Paul calls it the redemption of the body or, the perfection of the body. When I

hear about the suffering of some Christians it moves me. My hope really is built up when I realize that when the Lord Jesus comes He will change our vile bodies and make them into bodies like His very own. The bright and blessed hope for every child of God is the day of our perfect sanctification. The body will be redeemed and we shall never sin again in thought, word, or deed.

It is encouraging to read I Thessalonians 5:24, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." No one can reach the state of perfection by himself. God who sanctified us positionally will sanctify us perfectly. The faithfulness of God assures the answer to Paul's prayer. God isn't mocking us. The Bible assures, "We know that when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." God never fails in keeping His promises. One day He will send back the Lord Jesus to complete in us His own work of perfect sanctification. This is the blessed and purifying hope of every child of God. If we have this hope in Christ as our possession, there will be no place in our lives for indifference in the matter of Christian living.

II Thessalonians

By: Dr. Lehman Strauss

From all indications, II Thessalonians was probably written by Paul from Corinth not long after his first epistle to them. It was a necessary sequel. His first letter was designed to comfort, while the subsequent one was sent to correct. There had arisen a misunderstanding and a misrepresentation about the return of Christ. This left the Christians at Thessalonica in a confused state of mind. It is a startling and sobering thought even today that some distorted view of Bible prophecy can leave people in the state of mental confusion. The Christian is to be looking for that "blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). The false theological winds and waves are roaring today. II Thess. is given by God to steady us in the storm. We dare not read into passages thoughts and ideas which aren't there. On the other hand, we dare not neglect the difficult nor deliberately avoid those verses about which there is difference of opinion.

For a simple outline we suggest the following. First: "The Retribution of the Savior" (1:3-10). This is a word of consolation. Second: "The Restraint of the Holy Spirit" (2:1-7). This is a word of correction. Third: "The Revelation of the Man of Sin" (2:8-12). This is a word of condemnation. Finally: "The Responsibility of the Saints" (2:15-3:1, 2, 13). This is a word of counsel.

The spiritual progress of the Christians in Thessalonica was cause for praise to God on the part of Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheous. Believers were exhorted to increase and abound (I Thess. 3:12). They might have been confused about some doctrines, but they were constant and consistent in their deportment. The growing faith of the Thessalonians manifested itself all the more when they were in danger of their very lives. Their endurance and faith enabled them to bear up in persecutions and tribulations. The victory of their trial proved the genuineness of their faith (I Peter 1:7, 8).

Each term Paul uses in this first chapter expresses affliction. The enemies of the Gospel were doing their worst against the Thessalonians, but Paul reminded them that this was an evidence of their future glory. They would surely be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which they were suffering (Romans 8:17; II Timothy 2:12). This doesn't mean that Christians ought to go about with a persecution complex. We have no reason to feel sorry for ourselves, concluding that everybody is against us. The point is that our place in the kingdom will be determined by our behavior when we are called upon to suffer for Christ in this life. (Remember that not all Christians are made to suffer for their faith.) When our blessed Lord was persecuted, He gave us an excellent example, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. When He suffered He threatened not but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (I Peter 4:13).

The emphasis in II Thessalonians 1:5 isn't that men will enter the kingdom of God

only if they suffer for Christ. Rather the saints who suffer victoriously will have a more abundant entrance (II Peter 1:11). Unfortunately, some Christians are satisfied to settle for any reward, even for a mere entrance into God's kingdom. The Thessalonians were among those who were striving for a full reward and an abundant entrance. This is the very thing for which Paul commends them. Remember, suffering in itself isn't being commended, but rather the attitude of faith and love amidst the persecution. God isn't pleased if we complain and harp about a simple little trial. Let us endure it triumphantly, knowing that all things are working together for good to them who trust God. Ask the Lord to give us grace, courage and patience so that when trials do come, we can take them as a Christian living on the victory side of life.

In verses six through ten of the first chapter of II Thessalonians we have the punishment of those who are persecuting the believers. Here the Holy Spirit makes some general statements concerning the future judgments of God to be meted out on those enemies of the Gospel. The history of the Church is marked by the sufferings of its members. Jesus said to His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). The persecution the Thessalonians suffered at the hands of those unbelievers is also given in Scripture (Acts 17:1-9). In the perfect wisdom and judgment of God it is a righteous thing for the Lord to recompense evil for evil. He never acts wrongly. To punish evil doers is the prerogative of God who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."

Let the suffering Christians remain pure and patient. One day you will be vindicated by a righteous God. It isn't our prerogative to take judgment into our own hands. We aren't to retaliate ever to anyone for misdeeds performed against us. Leave all of these things with the Lord. He can do a much better job in vindicating us. A spirit of retaliation should never be in the heart of a believer.

Notice the encouragement of verse seven, "And to you who are troubled, rest!" Mark that word in your Bible. As the child of God experiences difficulty, trials and tribulations, he can also experience rest, leaving the future in God's hands. To rely upon the righteous judgment of the Lord should help slacken the tenseness. We all experience pressure when we pass through trials and tribulations (II Cor. 2:13). We shall be free from the bondage of burdens only when Christ is revealed from heaven. Still, we can rest in the Savior while waiting for His coming.

The righting of wrongs at the coming of Christ is described in vivid language in verse eight. The thought of fire and retribution depicts the appearing of our Lord at His second coming, following the Tribulation. Don't mistreat the Scripture here. Don't wipe out the word "fire." It isn't used metaphorically or allegorically. The Bible means what it says. It was literal fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19). It was literal fire that killed Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10). It will be fire when the Lord Jesus comes to earth (II Peter 3; Revelation 19; Psalm 97:3; Isaiah 66:15). All of these passages teach us that the fire is no mere symbol of judgment. Even if it were a symbol, the reality which answers to the symbol is far more terrible than the symbol itself. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). The fact that vengeance is here ascribed to Jesus Christ is evidence enough that He is regarded as God in the fullest sense. He is the divine agent assigned to exact the penalty of judgment upon unbelievers. This isn't a vindictive act upon God's part, but rather a solemn and sacred infliction of holy justice. The Lord can't be indifferent to good or evil. The Judge of all the earth will do right (Revelation 16:7).

The punishment will be meted out on them who know not God and who obey not the

Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are not two groups of people here, but only one. It doesn't refer to people who have never heard of the God of the Bible, the only true God, but rather those who are willingly ignorant (Romans 1:28). They stubbornly refuse the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Their desires are only toward the lust of the flesh. When a man hears the Gospel and spurns it, he must suffer the consequences.

Destruction in verse nine doesn't mean annihilation. It isn't total extinction but rather banishment from the presence of God. It is an irretrievable loss. The very thought of a man being beyond the reach of God and in everlasting shame and suffering should cause every one of us to tremble. Throughout the endless ages of eternity unbelievers will remain conscious in outer darkness (Matthew 25:30). Their final doom will come when Christ is glorified in His saints (II Thess. 1:10). The saints of the ages will share the glory while the sinners will suffer the gloom. Christ will assume authority over the universe, and He shall reign. The date of His coming hasn't been revealed. That He is returning is certainly assured. That day will be for the saints an hour of joy, but for sinners it will be the moment of judgment. Yes, II Thessalonians chapter one encourages us, "He shall come." Are you ready for the coming of the Lord? I trust so!

In the two epistles to the Thessalonians there are more than 20 references to the second coming of Jesus Christ. There are two distinct phases of His advent. These are Christ's return in the air for His saints before the Tribulation, and His return to the earth with His saints after the Tribulation. The first epistle deals with the Rapture while the coming of the Savior to the earth with His saints is set forth in the second. The first was written to comfort, while the second to correct.

A problem had arisen because there was confusion in the minds of the Thessalonians. They misunderstood the coming of the Lord to gather His own to Himself. The word "coming" in the Greek means "presence." It was used in the first epistle (2:19; 4:15) to refer to the time when the Lord will appear in the air, before the Tribulation. This gathering assures believers of deliverance from the wrath to come (1:10; 5:9). The Great Tribulation isn't to be confused with God's eternal wrath manifested in the everlasting judgment of sinners (John 3:36).

The Thessalonians were led to believe that the persecutions and trials through which they were passing were the Great Tribulation of that day, namely, the Day of the Lord (II Thess. 2:2). In King James or Authorized Version it says, "The day of Christ." The Revised Version has it correctly, "The day of the Lord." Believers were continuing in a state of mental agitation. The Thessalonian saints needed to know that whatever they heard about the Day of the Lord being then upon them was unauthorized teaching. It wasn't the work of the Holy Spirit, nor did it come from Paul.

In order to understand the nature of this error it is important that we understand the term, "The Day of the Lord." The expression, "The Day of Christ" isn't synonymous, nor can it be used interchangeably. The Day of the Lord is mentioned in I Thessalonians 5:2 and 3 where it is described as that time when "sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." It is the same as the Day of Jehovah mentioned in the Old Testament. This is when God's judgment will be poured upon the heavens and the earth.

The Day of the Lord commences with the Tribulation, following the Rapture of the Church, and it goes right on through the millennial reign of Christ. It is the day when God will deal sovereignly, judiciously and directly with human sin. Our present age is man's day, the time in which God is dealing in grace. Some

significant Old Testament passages are worth studying for yourself (Isaiah 2:12; 13:9-11; Joel 1:15; 2:31; Obediah v. 15; Malachi 4:5). The Day of the Lord hasn't come upon the earth as yet. This is the day of grace. Eventually God will reign judiciously, conquering sin and punishing sinners.

In verse three of chapter two the warning comes, "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." First, there will be a falling away, followed by the revealing of the man of sin. This is a most revealing prophecy. The Greek words translated "falling away" have both a primary and a secondary meaning. Our English word apostasy means "a departure" or a "defection" in a doctrinal sense. One of the signs of the end time is that there will be a widespread apostasy concerning the truth of historic Christianity as recorded in the Word of God. This falling away will reach its zenith during the Great Tribulation, immediately preceding Christ's Second Coming to the earth. The Savior Himself warned of this (Matthew 24). Paul wrote about it as well (I Timothy 4:12).

The secondary meaning is disappearance or departure. It also means to remove or to cause to be removed. Before the man of sin is revealed there must be this departure or removal. This refers to the Rapture of the Church, the departure of believers from earth to heaven (I Thess. 4:13-18).

In verses six and seven of II Thessalonians chapter two, Paul reminds us, "And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way." When our King James translation was issued in 1611, the word "let" meant to prevent. Now it means almost the opposite, to permit. English usage is found in Isaiah 43:13. So then, there is a restrainer, holding back the full manifestation of evil. The Antichrist can't be revealed until He has been removed.

These verses may indicate both the influence of a person as well as the person Himself. A fact not to be overlooked is that the Restrainer will be more powerful than the devil. No man can hold back the floodtide of evil. The man of sin receives his power from Satan (v. 9). Six thousand years of human history have proved that no man-made system can ever possibly restrain the forces of evil. Only God has that power.

In the days before the flood it was the third person of the Trinity, the Spirit of God, who restrained evil in the world. In its primary interpretation, Genesis 6:3 has reference to Noah's time. In its dispensational and prophetic application it can mean any time, including the end times. In this present age the Holy Spirit empowers the church corporately and every member individually, protecting against the opposition of Satan and his evil program. Since the Holy Spirit indwells the church, the removal of the Body of Christ will mean the removal of the Holy Spirit, the divine Restrainer.

People like to speculate about the identity of the Antichrist. It is amazing to hear their ideas. The fact is that no one knows. It is not only possible, but also probable that the Antichrist is living on the earth today. No one knows who he is until Christ has raptured the Church. "Then shall that wicked (or lawless one) be revealed" (v. 8).

Verses eight to twelve give us the revelation of this man of sin. This man of lawlessness will head up the movement of apostasy in its final stages. Throughout the course of history there have been many Antichrists (I John 2:18), but the Antichrist

of the last days, preceeding our Lord's coming to the earth, is the little horn of Daniel 7:8, and the prince that shall come (Daniel 9:26). He is also the willful king (Daniel 11:36), and the beast out of the sea (Revelation 13:1-10). He is not a mere abstract power, nor a mere influence, but a real escatological or prophetic person.

It is important to understand the designs, aims, and goals of the Antichrist (II Thess. 2:4). He is the opposer or the adversary of God. He will be none other than the devil incarnate, the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). His goal is obvious as he seeks to be worshipped as God. It was this wicked design that caused Lucifer to become Satan (Isaiah 14:12-14). Satan has his false apostles and deceitful workers who transform themselves into the apostles of Christ, posing as the ministers of righteousness (II Corinthians 11:13-15). He will achieve his nefarious deeds in the end times through a modern ecumenical church (Revelation 13).

II Thessalonians 2:9 and 10 tell us that the Antichrist's coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs, and all deceivableness of unrighteousness. His is mainly a method of deception. His demonstrations spring from falsehood because they originate in unrighteousness. Those who deliberately refuse the Gospel are readily deceived. God is going to send a powerful delusion which will be an act of retribution and judgment upon those who heard the Gospel but who willfully reject it. When men practice impurity, God gives them up in the lust of their hearts to impurity. When men stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the Lord, He finally gives them up to a base mind and to unclean behavior.

In verse 11, the King James Version has "a" lie, but in actuality it is the lie because the definite article is in the original text. The truth we know to be Christ Himself (John 14:6). The lie is the Antichrist claiming to be God. It is the deification of man. John wrote in John 8:44, "When he (Satan) speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own." The lie is Satan's that the unregenerate man whom he controls is god. Interestingly, God will use this evil design of the devil to work out His own eternal purpose. To encourage the children of God, the Holy Spirit assures them that when the proper time arrives the lawless one will be dealt with by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The devil isn't a match for our dear Savior. When Christ returns to earth with His saints, the devastating and decisive blow will be struck against the man of sin. We read, "whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth." He will first be slain physically by a single word or statement from Christ. The prophet Isaiah also made this prediction (Isaiah 11:4). John likewise wrote prophetically of Christ, "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations" (Revelation 19:15).

The sword is our Lord's own Word (Ephesians 6:17). It will be a swift and decisive act that will settle the issue once and for all. To "consume" means to slay utterly. It was by the Word of the Lord that all things were created; by the Word of the Lord all things are controlled; and by the Word of the Lord all sinners will be condemned. To destroy isn't that of extinction but rather ruin. When Jesus promised that believers shall not perish (John 3:16), He was assuring that those who trust in Him shall not lose their eternal well-being. In the flood of Noah's day the earth perished (II Peter 3:6); suffered the loss of well-being but it didn't cease to be. When Christ comes back to earth, the man of sin will be stripped of all power and effectiveness, rendered completely inoperative merely by the Word of Christ.

Christians have responsibilities in the light of this. "Therefore, brethren, stand

fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle" (I Thess. 2:15). This is a call to continue steadfastly in the apostle's teaching as given by the written Word. The traditions I take to mean Christian doctrine, referring to Christian deportment. No new revelation from God has been given to men since the close of the apostolic age.

The word "tradition" refers to the inspired writings as found in the Bible, the Word of God. This calls for the exercise of much care lest we become confused by the traditions of men. We Christians are to hold fast to the things of God, and the Word of God should be paramount in our thinking. Every decision we make should be in accord with God's Holy Word (I Corinthians 10:31). There can be no consistency in the life of the child of God if he neglects his Bible. Be persistent with the Word of God.

Paul also exhorts Christians to pray for the preservation of God's workmen (II Thess. 3:1, 2). Paul had utter dependence upon God. There was a specific need to keep on praying. At the time this second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written, there were particular enemies giving Paul some trouble. This is a concrete situation calling for prayer. By and large I have had great liberty in the ministry of God's Word. This work, however, isn't without its trials and oppositions. I urge all of God's people to take some ministry on your heart. Put it on your daily prayer calendar. The Lord will bless you and reward you for your faithfulness. These people were exhorted to pray for the prosperity of the Word. There isn't prayer suggested for personal blessings, but rather for the good success of the Gospel. Such intercession is important, because of the constant interference and hindrances from the enemies of the Gospel, opposition and demonic counterfeit. The devil isn't an innovator but rather an imitator. So much today looks and sounds like the Gospel but isn't the pure Word of God. We need the Lord's people praying for the protection of God's workmen as well as for the prosperity of God's Word.

If there were ever a practical lesson to be learned it is that of patience (3:5, 13). How much those suffering saints of Paul's day needed patience. James admonished, "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7). The patient endurance which characterizes Christ as He waits for the last soul to be saved should certainly characterize you and me. The goal of the Christian's expectation is the return of the Lord. Whatever the cost, the Christian must be persistent, prayerful and patient. There must not be any forsaking of our duty in our walk (II Thess. 3:6-9). We aren't to be weary in well-doing; the Lord is coming. Do everything in your power to remain faithful to the end. Don't lose heart. However long our Lord should delay His coming, and whatever trials may beset us, remain steadfast!

It isn't easy for a Christian to be consistent in this day of flux. This affluent period in society hasn't helped us. Christians in the last fifteen years have made more money than ever before. They have saved more than they have ever saved before, and have spent more than they have ever spent. This hasn't necessarily helped us spiritually. Let us learn to put first things first. Trials and tests are going to come upon us even before the Rapture. Jesus told us, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." This isn't the Great Tribulation but it is times of testing and tribulations. Let us be consistent and persistent for the Lord.

Faithfulness of God

By: Dr. Lehman Strauss

When we think of the word "faithful" we mean by definition that which is dependable, reliable or trustworthy. In Romans 3:3 Paul underscores what we might paraphrase to read, "Shall the unbelief of any person, Jew or Gentile, make the faithfulness of God without effect?" He quickly answers the question in verse four, "God forbid!" Or in other words, never think of such a thing. There are certain attributes of deity without which God would cease to be God. For example, God is omniscient which means that He possesses all knowledge. If there is anything He didn't know, He would cease to be God. The same is true of omnipotence, showing that our Lord is all-powerful. In the same sense faithfulness is an attribute of deity.

No human being can ever be faithful in the sense that God is faithful. I may have good intentions but unfortunately not be able to carry them out. Suppose I say to my wife, "I'll meet you at a certain time." Then I have a flat tire enroute. My wife is waiting for me some place and I don't show up as scheduled. Now my intentions were good, but I was unavoidably detained. In that sense, I wasn't faithful. Because of my human frailties, circumstances beyond my control, faithfulness couldn't be fulfilled. This can never happen with our Lord. In every detail God is faithful. He can't be stopped nor stymied. He is never turned away from His program. There is no power that can cause our Lord to be unfaithful.

The first verse on this subject for our study encourages us, "Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator" (I Peter 4:19). The first point then is that God is faithful to His creation. In the book of Genesis, right at the very start of the Bible, we find a term that repeats itself frequently. In verse four, "And God saw the light, that it was good." Verse nine tell us, "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. . . and God saw that it was good." In verse 12, "And God saw that it was good." In verse 18, "And God saw that it was good." In verse 21, "And God saw that it was good." And again in verse 25, "And God saw that it was good." The last verse of chapter one summarizes, "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."

The Lord created in sovereignty. God consulted with no one except for the consideration and consultation within the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The greatest discovery scientists have made is the orderliness of our universe. As man has invaded outer space he has discovered the remarkable fact that God is faithful. He created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). Paul explains further, "By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers--all things were created by him, and for him; And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:12). That last word means "to hold together." God made the worlds and now He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:1-3).

Thank God for His faithfulness to His creation.

The next on this subject is Deuteronomy 7:9, "Know, therefore, that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations." Yes, the Lord is a faithful God who keeps His covenants. A covenant, under normal circumstances, is a mutual agreement between two parties. This isn't the way the word is used in reference to our Lord. Rather it is a commitment or an agreement that is made by a single Person, namely God. It is unconditionally offered.

One of the first covenants is that which the Lord made with Noah. He promised, "Behold I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth" (Genesis 9:8-13). That is an interesting and a rather inspiring story. Can you imagine when Noah came out of the ark and saw that rainbow. That was the sign of His covenant with the patriarch. The Lord's covenant was that He would never again cut off all the human race, as well as all living flesh, from the earth by means of a world-wide flood. There have been many floods since Noah's day, but all have been localized. We will never know another earth-wide flood because God is faithful. God has never failed to keep one single promise.

Another covenant God made was to Abraham. We find the first indication of this in Genesis chapter 15. The Abrahamic Covenant has to do with three things. These are mentioned in Genesis chapter 12. First of all, there was personal blessing promised to Abraham. Secondly, God promised that from the loins of Abraham He would raise up a great nation. Certainly this He has done in Israel. The third part of the covenant is that God would give to Abraham and to his posterity a specific land. If you read your Bible there can be no question as to whom Palestine belongs (Genesis 12:1, 7; 15:7). The Arabs aren't entitled to the land. It was through Isaac, not Ishmael, that the seed should come. The land belongs to the Jews. Ultimately and finally that land belongs to the seed of Abraham through Isaac (Genesis 17:8). Our Lord is a covenant-keeping, faithful God. He can't go back on His promise.

There is one more covenant which we should consider. In II Samuel chapter 7 we learn of the Davidic covenant. Read those verses, especially eight through 13. This pictures graphically the promise of a throne and a kingdom which will have its final consummation in the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to this earth. When He establishes His millennial reign, the Davidic covenant will be fulfilled. Always remember ours is a faithful God. The Lord keeps His covenants!

This matchless attribute of God, namely faithfulness, isn't something man can possess. No one can ever be faithful in the sense that our Lord is faithful. Only He is absolutely dependable, reliable and trustworthy. This is an attribute belonging only to deity.

The next lesson on this subject emphasizes that God is faithful to His calling (I Cor. 1:9). The call of God is His invitation to the believing sinner to partake of all of the blessings of redemption, wrapped up in our great salvation. We read of some of these in Romans 8:28, a very familiar passage, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." The apostle continues in the next several verses to tell us, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he

did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." The word "called" appears three times in this section. Think of the fact that we are predestinated to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Justified and, in the sight of God, already glorified.

You may be sure that there won't be one true Christian in hell. Not one individual who has ever been born again will end up in eternal perdition. God is faithful to His calling. Jesus said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you (John 15:16). I am as certain of heaven right now as though I were already there. Not that I deserve it; not that I am any better than anyone else. The Bible clearly affirms that whom God calls He justifies; and those whom He has justified He has already glorified. The redeemed are positively assured of a place in heaven. If our eternal security depended upon our faithfulness, we all would have been in hell right now (Romans 8:35-39). Our guarantee is wrapped up in the faithfulness of God.

In I Corinthians the 10th chapter Paul deals with the temptations and trials of Christian people. In its historical background the apostle uses the first 10 verses in connection with Israel. He brings it up to date in verse 11, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples that they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Then in verse 13 we read, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." The Lord is faithful in taking care of His children, even in the midst of their trials and testings. Life is full of heartaches. Some of you recently have passed through deep waters. Still, you can always count upon the Lord. God knows how to take care of His children (II Thess. 3). Consider the case of Job who lost all that he had, including his loved ones. He was afflicted with excruciatingly painful sores from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet. The only human being left was his wife. Even she was ready to turn from God, urging her husband to do the same. Job looked back upon all of his losses and avowed, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15). He knew personally of the faithfulness of God. If you are feeling that your dearest friends and loved ones have let you down, you can't depend upon them, begin now with the blessed assurance that you can count on God and His faithfulness.

There is still another great text telling us that God is faithful. We read in I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God is faithful in cleansing us. Always remember that I John is written to believers; it is a family letter. We need to confess our sins to God not only because the Bible tells us so, but also because our own experience demands it. If you have a "holier than thou" attitude, assuming the role of sinlessly perfect, you have been deluded!

Look at verse eight, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The sin principle is a part of every person. Even we saved people still have the old nature. There has never been a total eradication of it. It shows its ugly self in our attitudes, actions, words, and deeds. At some time we sin either in thought, word, or deed. Our relationship with God isn't broken, but our fellowship certainly is.

We get back into fellowship with God by following the course established in I John 1:9. To "confess" is a Greek word which means literally "to say the same thing." Some of you have committed sins that you haven't confessed to God.

Additionally, you haven't made restitution to other people. The Lord wants you to confess that sin at once. Take that skeleton out of the closet of your heart and tell God what you did. He will do two things for you: He will forgive you and He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness. We have too many unclean professing Christians around today. Too many aren't living up to their profession.

You can count on the Lord's forgiveness because God is faithful. The Lord will enable us to forget some things if we really want to. Don't harbor thoughts that aren't wholesome, pure and right. When God forgives, God cleanses. He blots the sin out as far as the east is from the west. The Lord puts them behind His back to remember them against us no more forever. He casts them into the depths of the deepest sea. Thank God for His faithfulness.

Psalm 131

By: Dr. Al Sanders

Encouraging believers toward spiritual maturity is the challenge of II Peter 3:18, "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Keep in mind that growth is never static. You are either retreating or going ahead. Growth signifies that there must be life originally before any progressive development can take place. In the 131st Psalm we have some very beautiful suggestions as to how it is possible to become spiritually mature in the Lord. That should be the goal of every child of God! Never forget that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for our study, understanding, and application.

First of all, this is a Psalm of "ascents" or, in some versions it is translated a Psalm of "degrees." There are 15 of this type of Psalm in all and this one happens to be the 12th of the 15. These were Psalms which were generally thought to have been sung by the children of Israel as they went on their pilgrimage from the lower cities of the plains up to beautiful Jerusalem for their religious commemorations. As they approached that city which meant so much especially to David, their hearts were lifted in praise to the Lord.

Obviously this Psalm is one of the shortest chapters in the entire Word of God. We can cover it very quickly just by reading the few words, but it expresses great depth of thought and truth. This Psalm isn't something that we should use when we're tired. It requires thought for we mustn't pass over it quickly. This may be one of the shortest chapters in the Bible to read, but certainly the message the Holy Spirit has for us in these three verses is one of the longest lessons to learn. In fact, it is really a life-long experience. If we would compare these 150 Psalms to rare gems, in the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, we would have to look at the 131st as a "pearl which graciously adorns the neck of patience." Although it speaks of a young child, as we notice particularly in verse 2, yet it contains the experience of a full-grown man who has truly matured in the things of Christ.

The setting for the 131st Psalm is interesting because the one which precedes it is a Psalm of forgiveness. Here, though, the 131st is a song of humility. The fact of the matter is that forgiveness from God should cause us to be humble. Forgiveness implies sin. Without question, the Word of God clearly indicates that the sinner should be clothed in humility.

Because the 131st Psalm is so short, it might be easy to overlook with just a superficial reading. And yet, it throws tremendous light on one of the most cardinal of all Christian virtues, namely that of humility. No matter what our station in life may be, there is always the ugly, angry and defiling sin of pride which seeks to raise itself before us. Satan knows how effective he can be with this temptation. As we seek to grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us use His life as our highest pattern for humility. Although there are only three verses in this Psalm, wordiness or the lack of it, is no test whatsoever as a means whereby we might judge

the depth of thought which is presented. These lines are brief but they carry a tremendous message for our understanding and admonition.

First of all the writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is able to affirm, "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." We are told by God Himself, "Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will I not tolerate." In the New Testament the apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares something similar, "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits."

A man was traveling in the Midwest and had never seen a wheat farm before. Visiting a friend who was growing the crop in this particular area, he remarked how tall, straight and beautiful some of the stalks of wheat seemed, while others were bowed and bent over. The unschooled visitor suggested that the tall wheat looked so grand and perfect. His farmer friend, however, had to laugh as he gave him a beautiful object lesson. He suggested, "Let me show you something." And with that he broke off the heads of two wheat stalks, one erect, the other bent over. Then rubbing his hands together with the wheat stalks he showed how that the head which stood most erect had very few kernels on it while the one which was bowed low was simply loaded. What a beautiful picture that is of humility. Those who may stand erect in their own pride and conceit may be empty within, while those who are bowed low in their own self-estimation are filled with the fruits of the Spirit of God.

David declares, "Lord, my heart is not haughty." Can we come to the start of a day, or even to the end of it, as we stand before the Lord, the only One with whom we have to do, the One before whom all things are naked, can we honestly say these four things? "My heart is not haughty; my eyes are not lofty. I don't exercise myself in great matters, nor in things too high for me."

There are several verses of Scripture in the New Testament which deal specifically with this subject of pride and humility. In his first epistle, Peter tells us, "Let it be the hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." If you want to be biblically style conscious, that is the clothing to put on for the believer. Then later, in the 5th chapter, verse 5, the apostle further admonishes, "In like manner, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject to one another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." Never forget that pride goeth before a fall. Humility is that strange commodity which the moment you think you have it, you have actually lost it.

The second thing David declares for us is that his eyes are not lofty. In the book of Proverbs, the 6th chapter, we find the wisdom of Solomon's writings in which he strongly points out, "These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him." One of the specific things the Lord hates is "a proud look." So often greed, jealousy and envy can creep in upon us, even as believers. And we need cleansing constantly and daily from this terrible sin in the sight of God. It is possible for us to murder by our minds, hating those who have something more than we have, and which we can't possibly seem to attain. The apostle Paul knew the secret to satisfaction. He frankly explains, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Don't be concerned about the cafeteria style of Christian living which is simply "self-service" only. I like what Dr. Walter L. Wilson used to say when he pointedly declared, "Those who look down on their neighbors are actually living on a bluff."

The third thing that is testified for us in the 1st verse of Psalm 131 is, "I don't get excited about details." One of the best translations of that passage could be found in the New Testament in the 4th chapter of Philippians. Here Paul exhorts us, "Worry about nothing, but pray about everything." "Be anxious for nothing" the Bible admonishes. So often we get all worked up about things that probably never will come to pass. We treat the Lord as though He can't see what the problem is, or perhaps, a suggestion even far worse, that He doesn't really care that we as His children are going through these difficulties. God is vitally concerned about you. This is why Peter reminds us to cast all our care upon Him because He cares for us.

To phrase the fourth thing in this list of humility's characteristics, the Psalmist explains, "I don't try to get involved in things too high for me. I don't question God; I simply trust Him." Now, there are a lot of questions and circumstances I just can't understand. It is hard to comprehend. I don't understand why it is that the righteous have to suffer while the ungodly seem to prosper. That is a very real question. Then, from a theological standpoint, I can't begin to explain the Trinity; God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. There aren't three gods, but only One; yet, three-in-one. I can't understand why the Lord would ever choose to love me. Why would God want to take upon Himself, in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, the form of a human being? Not a prince or a king, but rather as a lowly insignificant individual in an unpretentious town in Israel. What David is saying is, "I simply trust the Lord. I don't pretend to know it all myself." Pride is something to be set aside. Swallowing pride will seldom lead to indigestion!

Verse two is beautiful as we study it in Psalm 131. Here the writer doesn't hesitate to confess, "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, like a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even like a weaned child." In Hebrew, the word that is translated "surely" is really in the form of an oath. It is a positive avowal and declaration. It is as though he were saying, "This is the way I have ordered my life. I have found the quietness for my existence in the person of the Lord Himself." The word for "behaved" in the original means, "I have adjusted myself to this pattern of life." Once you have accepted the Savior, as the New Testament puts it, "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him." Adjust yourself to the pattern and standard of life that would be pleasing to our heavenly Father. Interestingly, Asaph earlier had found the secret for behaving as a child. In that wonderful 73rd Psalm, verses 25 and 26, he asks the rhetorical question, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart fail, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

The Lord Jesus reminds us in the 18th chapter of Matthew, verse three, "Unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven." He certainly isn't talking here about the fact that we should all become physically the size of a child. Really the focal point is, "Unless ye become as little children in your faith, accepting God, taking Him at His word." This is the crux of the idea. In the New Testament we read, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." "Sincere" means pure, unadulterated, coming to God and trusting Him as He is, as a weaned child would do at his mother's breast. This is a beautiful picture of an infant who has been weaned lovingly of his mother and has found contentment. That child who is satisfied now physically has no thoughts about what he is going to wear, where he is going to spend the night. He can sleep anywhere.

Have you ever stopped to think about it? We lavish upon our children all sorts of special items. At Christmas time the television airways are crammed with all sorts of appeals for toys. A child who is contented is just as happy with old tin cans

(with the sharp edges removed, of course), empty boxes, cartons, or what-have-you. They don't need all of that expensive paraphernalia that soon deteriorates into nothing more than broken junk! With David we can say, "I have adjusted and quieted myself like a child that is weaned of his mother." We have to come as little children and find the contentment that the Lord has waiting for us.

Notice that it is a child who is weaned, not by himself, but of his mother. The Lord is the one Himself who weans us. He weans us away from self-sufficiency, self-will, self-seeking; He weans us away from the world, from materialism. Nothing but the grace of God can make us quiet under afflictions, trials, disappointments and irritations that so often come to us.

There are three things this word "wean" would suggest. God weans us from the embittering world. And then sometimes the Lord removes from us the things that we love. But mostly He weans us by giving us better food than the world has to offer. I love that beautiful Psalm that encourages us freely, "O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man who trusteth in Him." He wants to quiet our hearts even as the poet has written,

*"I needed the quiet so he drew me aside,
Into the shadows where we could confide.
Away from the hustle and bustle where all the day long
I hurried and worried when active and strong.*

*"I needed the quiet, though at first I rebelled.
But gently, so gently, my cross He upheld.
And whispered so sweetly of spiritual things
Though weakened in body, my spirit took wings
To heights never dreamed of when active and strong
He loved me so greatly He drew me along.*

*"I needed the quiet; no prison my bed,
But a beautiful valley of blessings instead -
A place to grow richer in Jesus to hide.
I needed the quiet so He drew me aside."*

The third and final verse on the surface would seem only to be applicable to the Jewish nation. In actuality it does have a tremendous spiritual message for our own hearts as well. The Psalmist urges, "Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and forever." Or, as a better paraphrase has it, "Trust now and always in the Lord." Satan may tempt us to think that since we have failed and failed so often we may as well give up.

I have some devil grass growing in our back yard. It seems to sprout up almost overnight and occasionally I am tempted to think, "Why bother trying to find all the roots when it always seems to get the better of me. Why not just let it take over and forget it!" But I know it is going to ruin my yard if such is the case, so I keep at it. And there may be some temptations to which you have so constantly succumbed you have wondered whether or not there is ever going to be any victory in your life in that particular point. But God does give strength and help in our time of need. There is a little saying that declares, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." It isn't scriptural but it is a very real principle. Start now. Start now with more than just a mediocre existence. Use the resources of the peace and understanding that can come in spiritual growth as we are weaned of the Savior.

That word "hope" is a great one with which to close. It doesn't stand alone. In the sentence it offers, "Let Israel." But there, I don't think it would be a misappropriation of Scripture if you inserted your own name, "Let Al hope." If there were just those three words, your faith would truly be in vain. . . and so would mine. When "hope" is used in Scripture it is most generally followed by three positive words, simple monosyllabic and yet tremendous in truth. "Let Al hope in the Lord." Not in money, not in health, not in position, not in family, not in wife or children, but it is in the Lord because all of these other things will some day fade away, but the Lord endures forever.

David was persecuted, hounded as a wild animal for more than ten years by King Saul in his wicked envious state of mind. Yet we see David's unflinching, unflinching, un-faltering hope in the Lord. He had patience for the crown that would someday be bestowed upon him. John Bunyan wrote, "He that is down need fear no fall; he that is low no pride; he that is humble ever shall have God to be his guide."

You grow in the grace of our Lord by looking at these standards and saying, "I can avow that I'm not haughty; my eyes aren't filled with pride; I haven't exercised myself in a way that would be displeasing to the Lord; but rather I am trusting Him, not questioning." May the Lord help us to find the source of encouragement and strength in these three simple but tremendous verses of promise found in Psalm 131.

Panel Discussions

Panel: Dr. Chase, Dr. Feinberg and Dr. Sutherland

Q. "Could you explain I Samuel 31:5 and II Samuel 1:9? They seem to be contradictory."

A. Allowed to stand without explanation, these two passages would present problems. I Samuel 31:5 reads, "And when his (Saul's) armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword and died with him." Saul had earlier committed suicide. The later verse finds David encountering an Amalekite who explains the event more fully. Saul had begged that his apparent abortive attempt of self-destruction be completed. The king had desired to be slain. He was suffering but still alive. The Amalekite unhesitatingly tells how he stood over him and killed him. After this he took the crown and bracelet and brought them to David. Remember that the Holy Spirit has directed the writer to give us an inspired record, which means wholly apart from error. The armor bearer saw Saul lying dead. The scene is accurately recorded. Then along comes this Amalekite who probably wanted to ingratiate himself into David's favor. He explains, "It was just about all over with him anyhow; he even asked me to kill him. This is why I put him out of his misery." In actuality the king was already dead. He had lied, and because of his lie he was slain himself.

Q. "When a Christian locks his doors or fastens his seatbelts, doesn't this show a lack of faith?"

A. You may be assured that the Lord takes care of His own. Practically speaking, He has also endowed human beings with a degree of common ordinary sense. This has nothing to do with faith nor a lack of it. You might just as well feel that a Christian shows lack of faith by not sticking his hand into the fire, expecting that it won't be burned. Living in a sinful world means we are subject to many of the activities and conduct of the people around us. Sometimes the Lord allows us to go through suffering and sorrow for our own good. This doesn't mean for a moment that we are to put ourselves deliberately in the way of those things that would harm us. We should do the sensible thing in every instance, resting in the confidence that whatever comes is the Lord's will for our lives. Don't flaunt yourself in a foolish manner. This isn't acting according to faith but rather is being presumptuous.

Q. "Can you give a simple explanation of the Trinity which I can use with unbelievers as well as new Christians?"

A. This certainly isn't a simple subject. The finite mind can never begin to fathom, much less to explain, the subject of the Trinity. We are talking about deity which isn't susceptible to our full comprehension. There are parallels and illustrations which can be used, but they can't begin to tell the whole story. In

the first place, unbelievers can't understand that which is spiritual (I Cor. 2:14). Remember that there aren't three separate deities. Such would be polytheism. We believe in one substance of the Godhead manifested in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Augustine was working on this subject on one occasion and having an extremely difficult time. As he walked along the beach he saw a little boy with a bucket and shovel. He kept running to the surf, dipping water into his little container. Then it was he realized, "Am I not just as foolish as this little fellow? He thinks he can empty out the ocean in all its magnitude with his little receptacle. Here I am, a human being, finite, having a limited beginning and a limited end, trying to comprehend the infinite God."

There is a family relationship in the Godhead. This is just as there is a family relationship on earth: mother, father, and child. Here we see three distinct persons but only one family. God the Father is distinct; God the Son is distinct; and God the Holy Spirit is distinct. In the 39 books of the Old Testament the emphasis is on the unity of God. Israel was trained away from polytheism and idolatry. The emphasis is on one God. In the New Testament there is a manifestation on earth in flesh and blood of one of the Persons of the Trinity. Each One has a distinct work in redemption. God the Father desires to love the world, sacrifice the Son, and to regard His work with great satisfaction. He draws human beings unto the Savior. The Son will also love the world, laying down His life as the Good Shepherd. Ultimately He will take again His life and live forevermore. He is our justification, sanctification and glorification. The Holy Spirit takes all the benefits the Lord provided for us at Calvary. He makes them real to every believing heart. When the work of redemption is accomplished, the work of mediation is all finished after the millennium, then Jesus will deliver over the kingdom to God (I Cor. 15:20-28). He delivers everything back to God the Father, to whom it rightly belongs. That the Son and the Father are one doesn't mean one Person, but rather one is substance. No one can see God because He is a Spirit. Not one of us is yet in his ultimate resurrection body. Revelation 22:3 reminds us that in a coming day we shall see Him.

Q. "At Christ's second advent, after the Tribulation, will there be people all over the earth, as now, or just in the Holy Land? Will the population of the earth at that time be very small?"

A. Someone may be led to this assumption because the book of Revelation states that those who don't have the mark of the beast will be killed. At the coming of Christ the wicked oppressors will be destroyed. There are now more than four billion people on the earth. How many of these, during the Tribulation, will have the mark of the beast, no one knows. The armies of the Antichrist are busy in the more populated centers of the world. They will keep control of the commercial and military aspects of the world. They won't be concerned with scattered, isolated individuals. There probably will be many in more remote areas who will never become involved with the Antichrist. So, there will be those who won't need the mark of the beast to carry on commercial activities. They have no desire to do so since they live unto themselves. Our Lord Jesus will be living and reigning in the Holy Land after the Tribulation. There will be great numbers going into His kingdom. Revelation chapter seven shows that they will be from all nations, kindreds, tribes, and tongues, having received the Savior through the testimony of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses. It is true that there will be a judgment, spoken of in the Revelation, that causes one-third of the earth to be burned up. This would still leave a lot of people in the world.

Q. "Regarding Hosea 6:2, 3, does this refer specifically to the 1,000 year reign of our Lord Jesus?"

A. These verses read, "After two days will he (meaning God) revive us (meaning Israel); in the third day He will raise up, and we shall live in His sight." Make certain that you never mix one context with another when only an outward semblance appears! Perhaps the reason for the comparison is that Peter states a thousand years is as one day and a day as a thousand years. This doesn't mean though that every single day is a thousand years. How could this apply to the wonderful work of the Lord Jesus? He wasn't in the grave 3,000 years! Scriptural symbolism isn't stereotyped. This is what makes for beautiful variety. When Israel returns in the last days the Messiah will return to His place. The children of Israel will have to say, "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord" (Psalm 118; Matt. 23:39). They will have to acknowledge their offense. Remember how they had boasted, "We will not have this man to rule over us; we have no king but Caesar." (They haven't had any king but the ceasars of this world ever since.) This passage in Hosea couldn't possibly mean a thousand years since it states two days. This would be a gross misrepresentation of scriptural interpretation.

Q. "Since Thomas wasn't with the other disciples when Jesus breathed on them, and he therefore didn't receive the Holy Spirit, do you think this is the reason he doubted?"

A. This is a new suggestion, however, nothing is stated nor even implied that the reason the disciples believed the Lord was because they were given the Holy Spirit. Rather, their belief was based on the fact that they had seen the risen Lord. Seeing was believing, and this is exactly what Thomas observed. He hadn't seen the risen Lord, therefore, he wasn't going to believe. This breathing on them wasn't the same as when the Holy Spirit descended on them at Pentecost.

Q. "Is the sin unto death spoken of in I John 5:16, 17 a sin which Christians commit, and which may result in their being taken home to heaven?"

A. This is a very searching question and very valid. If a Christian sins in such a manner in God's sight it may result in his being taken home in death. The reference here means physical death. Though we are saved by grace, God knows how to do the work well. One who is justified is sanctified and will also be glorified. There won't be any shrinkage along the way. This doesn't mean that a person can live any way he wants to. If you love your own children you still don't allow them to take over the whole operation of the home. This wouldn't exhibit real love. The scene presented in this verse is of a man who has known the way. Yet, obstinately and defiantly he has opposed the Lord. As a result, God takes him out of the world. We saw this happen to Ananias and Sapphira. They sinned the sin unto death. They realized God knew their hearts. They rendered their usefulness for the Lord's glory on earth as nothing. We sometimes say it this way in connection with the sin unto death, "If you do the will of the Lord, He will take you home and crown you. If you disobey in such a manner as this, He will crown you and take you home!"

Q. "Where in the Bible does it say that marriage vows should be 'Till death do us part'? If two unbelievers are married, wouldn't it be better for them to declare, 'As long as this love shall last'? That way, at least upon divorce, a vow wouldn't be broken."

A. Scripture reminds us that Adam married Eve, although there aren't any specific

vows recorded. The marriage ceremony is clear that it is a joining of two lives together forever. To declare, "till death do us part" is absolutely in the biblical tradition. To express simply, "As long as this love shall last" for believer or unbeliever is absolutely satanic. It comes from the subculture. By such a token marriage isn't really needed to begin with. It is like the devilish philosophy which states that "premarital relationships are all right provided there is love." If such were the case then there wouldn't be any adultery! Satan has more new tricks as well as all of the familiar old ones. We all fluctuate in our moods if we are honest before God. Because of pressures and problems, we might say, "I thought I loved you, but I was wrong. I'll just throw it all over." Just as you chose to love that husband or that wife in the beginning, so you can choose to love him or her again. Love is a matter of the will. No one has ever tried to love a telephone pole, has he? The Lord urges us, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." This is a definite act of the will. Believe me, such a profound change in the marriage vows wouldn't be a better saving at all. Ask God for a better marriage, not for a better way out.

Q. "Is there a difference between crosses and burdens for the Christian?"

A. Essentially there isn't much difference between the two (Matthew 11:28-30; 16:24). We are to deny ourselves world popularity, the pleasures of sin, and identify with the Lord Jesus Christ as He suffered and died on the cross for us. Our relationship to the world thereby becomes a cross, as we bear their ridicule and abuse. We are taking up our crosses, going, as it were, without the camp with the Lord Jesus Christ. Burdens can be of an entirely different sort. The cares of this world make us heavy laden. There are economic, social, physical and spiritual concerns. People are burdened today who don't know where their next meal is coming from. This isn't a cross but a burden. Christ lovingly invites, "All that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." The Lord takes the majority of the load while we have the light portion.

Q. "Can we claim Isaiah 53:5 for a promise of physical healing?"

A. We are greatly concerned about the physical well being not only of Christians but also of unbelievers, especially as we see such tragedies as those in earthquake and disaster-ridden areas. It is amazing how many natural catastrophes are coming upon the world, just as the Lord prophesied. God's servant wrote, "But he (the coming Messiah) was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). The first principle of biblical interpretation is to determine what the writer is talking about. When he uses the words, "wounded for our transgressions" he is referring to the sin question. "All we like sheep have gone astray," means going away from the will of God. "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" is again about sin. You can't have physical healing here or else the promise of peace would have to be physical too. This would mean that anybody who accepted Christ as Savior would be living in a peace setting all the time. What would you do then with II Corinthians 8:9, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich." Have you looked at your bank account lately? Are you rich? The suggestion here isn't offering us material or physical wealth, it is all in the spiritual realm. The same holds true with healing. We are in full sympathy for those who are suffering. There is something far more necessary in life than physical healing. We recommend it to you in spiritual healing through the Lord Jesus Christ. Receive Him now, and you will be healed spiritually from all your sin.

Q. "Please explain Matthew 24:48-51. I have children that have been saved but live on in their old ways."

A. This comes from a passage which is known as the Olivet Discourse. It is a most important prophetic address given by our Lord while He was here on earth. The basis for determining anyone's salvation is based upon their personal faith in Christ as Savior. Only the Lord truly knows what is in their heart. They are responsible before God. If an individual has entered the door of salvation that is a once for all transaction. Eternal life isn't something one receives only to have it taken away every time he sins. Remember that we have received this invaluable treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us! Even the apostle Paul declared, "I haven't yet reached the goal that God in Christ has placed before me."

The passage about which you have asked is being given by way of a parable to teach alertness and watchfulness for the servant of the Lord. One way we know a servant is that he doesn't live exactly like the world. If your children who apparently once were saved seem to live on in their old ways, in love they should have it pointed out to them that it isn't just enough to believe in the Gospel; they must also behave the Gospel! There isn't only orthodoxy, a right thinking of Scripture, but also an orthopraxy, proper practicing of it. Let us pray our children into the center of the Lord's will. Everybody is in God's will either permissively or preferably directly. Be sure you are saved and be careful to maintain good works.

Q. "Regarding Christmas trees, as well as other observances such as Valentine's Day, the Easter Bunny, Halloween, etc., if the truth is explained about the origin and real meaning of each celebration, do you think it's wrong for Christians to participate in such activities?"

A. Your idea is a good one in explaining carefully the real background involved. When a child is taught the actual meaning of Christmas, as an example, then he doesn't identify Santa Claus with Jesus Christ. Generally it is only those of us who are older who get confused on these various matters. It is the actual event and the underlying basic truths which we need to underscore so definitely.

Q. "Where does the Bible, especially the New Testament, say that a man's ten percent tithe should come before the support of his family, even if the rent, food, and so forth cannot be paid?"

A. It is a very interesting thing that the word "tithe" occurs in Genesis before the Law, as well as in Exodus after the Law was given. It is found all through the first five books of the Bible. It is necessary to get the whole biblical picture. Malachi 3:9, 10 gives us an excellent passage to underscore the use of tithes. The people under the law were to "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse." This didn't mean after they had paid all their bills. Although this passage was stated for Israel, and the "storehouse" wasn't a church, the principle is the same. If you give God His own, you will not be able to get enough of a huge container to handle all the resultant blessings. Matthew 6:33 urges us, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." The "all things" are the things of this earthly, material, physical, mundane life. In I Corinthians 16 we have the principle for the New Testament system. There is no mention of tithing. The only reason we suggest the idea of the tithe is that one has to start some place. The preceding chapter on the resurrection gives us the most glorious and hope-inspiring portions in the whole Bible. Immediately following this highest pinnacle of majesty Paul declares,

"Now concerning the collection for the saints." That rings quite a change, doesn't it? These statements are by inspiration of the Spirit of God inerrantly. Remember, all Scripture is written for our edification. We are told what to do on the first day of the week. It isn't a matter of legalism but of love. The urging is, "Let every one of you lay by him in store." This can be in your pocketbook or some place such as church envelopes. They are helpful. It is "as God hath prospered you." This doesn't say "tithe." It isn't what you give but how much you have left! You cannot outgive God in His marvelous grace.